

# FAQ

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## 1. I want to write a general information article about NIH history. Where should I start?

The best place to begin is with the NIH Historian's Short History of NIH on the web. There is also a bibliography of NIH history posted on the NIH History Office and Stetten Museum's website.

## 2. What is the difference between "intramural" and "extramural" research at NIH?

Intramural NIH research is done by scientists employed by the Federal government. Most of them work on the NIH campus in Bethesda, Maryland. Extramural NIH research is done across the United States and in some foreign countries by investigators who have been awarded grants through the NIH program.

## 3. What is a "Federal record"?

A Federal record can be any document created for or received by the government in the course of doing business. These records are the property of the U. S. Government and do not belong to individuals. NIH Federal records meet at least one of the following requirements:

they contain information about the organization, functions, policies, procedures, decisions or other activities of NIH or any of its components, or  
they contain information, such as biomedical data, which is useful to NIH in carrying out its mission  
Federal records can come in any form, such as paper, microfilm, tapes, cards, or disks. They can be things commonly found in office files, such as letters, memoranda, or reports. They may also be laboratory notebooks, instrument readings, photographs, sound recordings, motion pictures, maps, books, drawings, data bases, or in any other form or format.

Working with each government agency, archivists at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) create a document called a records schedule that identifies documents as permanent or non-permanent according to type. Permanent records at NIH are kept for 30 years, then reviewed again by NARA archivists and added to Record Group (RG) 443: Records of the NIH. Non-permanent records are destroyed after a specified period of time. For information about finding these records, see Answers 9 and 10.

## 4. How do I find information about an NIH grant that was awarded before 1972?

Abstracts of grants awarded before 1972 are printed in the annual bibliography of NIH grants. For a list of these publications, see Sources for Information on NIH Research Grants. The publications are available at most university libraries with a Federal documents section and in some medical school libraries. They can also be ordered by interlibrary loan through your local library.

## 5. How do I find information about an NIH grant that was awarded since 1972?

Abstracts of grants awarded since 1972 are available online from the Research Portfolio Online Reporting Tools. Copies of full grant applications, when available, can only be requested through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) process; see the answer to question 18, below.

## 6. How can I trace the history of a particular grant's approval process?

For basic information on approval date and grant amount, see answers 4 and 5 above. The National Archives and Records Administration does not routinely keep case files for grants. In a few cases, an individual scientist may have donated grant records to a private archive, such as a university's special collections. Sometimes an NIH institute keeps grant information in a Federal records Center beyond the scheduled destruction date. Researchers can contact the National Institute of Health Office of Records Management for information.

## 7. How can I trace the history of a grant application that was turned down?

Under the Privacy Act of 1974, the Federal government is not permitted to keep records of grants that were not funded. All such records are destroyed. For additional information about the Privacy Act, see <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/coc/faqs.htm>.

## 8. I can't find any current information on some NIH institutes described in older reference material, such as the National Microbiological Institute or the NIH Division of Biologics Standards. What happened to these organizations?

Many NIH components have undergone name changes over the years. For a complete history of these changes, see this page.

Some institutes have also switched agencies altogether. For example, in 1972 the NIH Division of Biologics Standards (formerly the Bureau of Biologics) was transferred administratively to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Today it is known as the Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research (CBER). Its buildings remain on the NIH campus in Bethesda. For information about biologics activities since 1972, contact the FDA Historians: Dr. Suzanne White Junod ([sjunod@ora.fda.gov](mailto:sjunod@ora.fda.gov)) and Dr. John Swann ([jswann@ora.fda.gov](mailto:jswann@ora.fda.gov)), phone 301.443.6367. For information on biologics activities before 1972, or for other questions on biologics activities before 1972, contact the Office of NIH History.

## 9. Where can I find information on a study that took place more than 30 years ago?

Federal records (see Question 3), if more than 30 years old and deemed historically significant, are stored in the National Archives. NIH records are held at the Archives II facility in College Park, Maryland. Check the website for hours, location and contact information. The record group for Public Health Service records is RG 90 and the record group number for the National Institutes of Health is RG 443.

Other useful contacts for older NIH records are:

The historians of the Food and Drug Administration History Office, 301.443.6367: Dr. Suzanne White Junod ([sjunod@ora.fda.gov](mailto:sjunod@ora.fda.gov)) and Dr. John Swann ([jswann@ora.fda.gov](mailto:jswann@ora.fda.gov)).

## 10. Where can I find information on a study done in the last 30 years?

NIH records less than 30 years old are held by the creating institute. Such files must be accessed either through an institute's Records Manager or via the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) process. The best place to begin, however, is with the NIH History Office. Please contact the Office of NIH History. Read more about FOIA requests at <http://www.nih.gov/icd/od/foia/>.

## 11. Where can I find information about an ongoing project, such as the Framingham Heart Study?

Start by consulting the Office of NIH History to locate the information you want. Some current information is held by the originating institution. Some other records must be obtained via the Freedom of Information Act process (see <http://www.nih.gov/icd/od/foia/>). Information on NHLBI's Framingham page is an excellent start at [www.framinghamheartstudy.org/](http://www.framinghamheartstudy.org/)

## 12. How do I determine when a particular scientist worked at NIH?

## 13. How do I find out who the lab chief was?

## 14. Where can I get information about the projects on which a particular scientist worked as a postdoctoral fellow at NIH?

## 15. How can I find out about the gender, race, and national origin composition of NIH scientists?

There are several sources of historical NIH personnel information available:

For NIH personnel before 1950, especially for the PHS Commissioned Officers Corps, the best place to begin is the Office of the Public Health Service Historian.

The names of NIH personnel since 1950 can usually be found in the annual NIH telephone books held by the NIH History Office. These publications are divided into an alphabetical listing and an organizational listing. It is possible to identify, for example, which laboratory an intramural investigator worked in and who his or her laboratory chief was. The NIH History Office and the NIH Library all hold published copies of the NIH Scientific Directory and Annual Bibliography for 1956-1992. The National Library of Medicine (NLM) has volumes from 1969-1992. The RePORT database provides access for the public to search for scientific concepts, emerging trends and techniques, or identify specific projects and/or investigators.

For NIH personnel before 1950, especially for the Public Health Service Commissioned Officers Corps, an excellent resource is the Office of the Public Health Service Historian currently located at the National Library of Medicine.

## 16. How can I arrange to interview someone currently working at NIH?

Consult the Office of NIH History to arrange interviews.

## 17. What sources of NIH history are in the National Library of Medicine?

The History of Medicine Division of the National Library of Medicine holds some manuscript collections, photographs, and posters related to NIH history. See <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/index.html>.

## 18. What actions of the NIH Director might have affected the studies I wish to research?

The Office of the Director of NIH maintains its own files on the activities and policies of the Director and other senior NIH officials, including the Director of Intramural Research and the Director of Extramural Research. Normally, these files are available via a Freedom of Information Act request (see <http://www.nih.gov/icd/od/foia/>). As with other searches for NIH documents, the best place to begin is with a consultation with the Office of NIH History.

## 19. Where can I find information about past NIH budgets?

Overview NIH budget information from 1938 through 2007 is published in the NIH Almanac (<http://www.nih.gov/about/almanac/index.html>). Recent and detailed budget information can be found at <http://officeofbudget.od.nih.gov/>.

## 20. Should I use the Freedom of Information Act to get historical information?

Requests under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) may or may not be the best approach for historical researchers. You should review the FOIA website at <http://www.nih.gov/icd/od/foia/> for general information about the process. As always, make an initial appointment with the Office of NIH History.

## 21. I am doing picture research for a project. Where can I find an NIH physician's "official" photograph? Where can I find photos of people working in labs?

No central collection of "official" photographs exists. Photos of individuals and of research activities may be found primarily in three places:

The Office of NIH History photo archive.

The National Library of Medicine's Digital Collections at <https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/>, or

The public information offices of individual institutes. See list of institutes at <http://www.nih.gov/icd/>

You can contact Barbara Harkins, Archivist in the Office of NIH History at 301.496.8856.

## 22. I am interested in doing research on instruments used by NIH scientists. Is it possible for me to find out more about them and see the instruments themselves?

The DeWitt Stetten, Jr., Museum of Medical Research at the NIH is the repository for historic biomedical research instruments and other NIH artifacts. The Stetten Museum operates as a single unit with the NIH History Office, with the NIH Historian serving as Director of the Stetten Museum. Access to the instrument collection is by appointment with the Curator, Michele Lyons, who may be contacted at [lyonsm@mail.nih.gov](mailto:lyonsm@mail.nih.gov) or 301.496.7695.